

Reps. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Ted Poe (R-Texas) joined Academy Award-winning actor Robert Duvall at Wilderness Battlefield today to speak out against Wal-Mart's plans to build a super store on the historic Virginia site.

If built, the store would stand across the road from the national park commemorating the bloody struggle and within the battlefield's historic footprint.

The Congressmen and Duvall spoke a day before the 145th anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness, which claimed the lives of 29,000 American soldiers. An estimated 1,234 Vermonters lost their lives during the course of the two-day battle, which began May 5, 1864.

"The 1st Vermont Brigade's brave stand at the Battle of the Wilderness exemplifies the spirit and sacrifice of Vermont troops in all conflicts our country has faced. This hallowed ground must be protected and preserved so that future generations of Vermonters can appreciate our state's crucial role in saving the Union," Welch said. "I am hopeful that Wal-Mart will respect the history and tradition of the Wilderness site and reconsider its plan to build a store in such close proximity to this treasured landmark."

Welch and Poe toured the battlefield site Monday morning, visiting monuments to the Vermont and Texas troops who perished there. The Vermont monument, a 17-ton granite depiction of Camel's Hump carved at Barre's Rock of Ages quarry, stands on a 435-acre plot of land that was preserved with funding secured by former Sen. James Jeffords.

Welch and Poe have been calling on Wal-Mart to change the location of its proposed store since February, when the two wrote CEO Mike Duke urging him to take action to preserve this vital piece of history. The Congressmen also [took to the House floor in March](#) to reiterate their opposition to the store's placement.

During Monday's event Poe said, "This land, like other battlefields in our country, is consecrated with the blood of Americans. Many are still buried here and known only to God. We owe these Americans the right to keep this battlefield preserved for history and not to have a corporation, like Wal-Mart, lay asphalt over their graves. I feel the definition of corporate responsibility must always extend to respecting America's hallowed grounds. Those values should not be eroded for the sake of Wal-Mart's commercial gain."

Duvall, who portrayed ancestor Gen. Robert E. Lee in the 2003 film *Gods and Generals*, said, "The Wal-Mart Corporation has it within its power to be a savior of the Wilderness Battlefield. Simply by moving to an alternate location slightly further from the battlefield, they have the ability to protect this critical piece of American history for generations to come."